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NEW YORK TIMES
 21 November 1986

IRANIAN DEAL LED TO 2,000 MISSILES, A LAWMAKER SAYS

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 20 — The House majority leader said today that Israel, acting with the approval of the United States, had shipped Iran 2,008 TOW anti-tank missiles and at least 235 Hawk anti-aircraft missiles, a quantity of weapons much greater than previously acknowledged.

The Congressional leader, Jim Wright, Democrat of Texas, said he learned of the shipments from Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, President Reagan's national security adviser. He said there was a series of shipments by Israel, which was "given to understand it was carrying out the wishes of the United States."

The statement by Mr. Wright came amid a wave of protest that swept Capitol Hill today over the Reagan policy on Iran.

Lawmakers Rebut Reagan

Several members, including Senator Sam Nunn, Democrat of Georgia, the incoming chairman of the Armed Services Committee, issued point-by-point rebuttals of comments by Mr. Reagan at his news conference Wednesday night. Other legislators said the intelligence laws should be rewritten so Presidents could not conceal covert operations from Congress for more than a few days.

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William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, is to appear before the intelligence committees. Admiral Poindexter, meanwhile, is to discuss the operation with committee members in an informal meeting at the White House.

The number of weapons described by Mr. Wright appeared to undercut the Administration's contention that the shipments to Iran did not affect the military balance in the region.

Comment by Regan

Last week, for example, the White House chief of staff, Donald T. Regan, said the weapons sent to Iran "wouldn't be one day's ammunition supply."

At his news conference, Mr. Reagan said repeatedly that the United States had not authorized any shipments by other countries. Shortly afterward, the White House issued a statement acknowledging that "there was a third country involved in our secret project with Iran," without naming the country.

The Congressional hearings will center on unanswered questions about the dealings with Iran. Committee members want to know how the operation was arranged and financed, why notice to Congress was delayed for 11 months and what persuaded senior policy makers to send arms to Iran.

They also want to hear from other Administration officials about how the secret dealings with Iran, identified by the Government as a country that supports terrorism, fit with Washington's

policy of building an international front against terrorism.

Mr. Wright, the next Speaker of the House, was one of several lawmakers who asserted today that President Reagan had violated laws in secretly shipping arms to Iran.

Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, said President Reagan had followed all applicable laws and had been advised from the outset on legal issues by his Attorney General, Edwin Meese 3d.

A wide range of lawmakers said they were concerned that Mr. Reagan had not followed the law.

Appearing on the CBS program "Nightwatch," Senator John C. Stennis, the conservative Democrat from Mississippi, joined Senators John Glenn, Democrat of Ohio, William Proxmire, Democrat of Wisconsin, Dale Bumpers, Democrat of Arkansas, and Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, in asserting that the President was in violation of statutes about Congressional notification.

Carrying a well-marked copy of "Compilation of Intelligence Laws," Mr. Wright said at least three statutes might have been violated.

They were Section 501 of the National Security Act, which requires prior notice to Congress of covert activities; Section 502, a year-old provision of the same law that allows the intelligence agencies to spend money on purposes not authorized by Congress only after informing the intelligence committees, and Section 8042 of the Defense Department Appropriation bill, which says no funds may be transferred or reprogrammed for intelligence purposes without notice to Congress.

President Reagan has said the shipments to Iran were a covert intelligence operation. In a finding he signed last Jan. 17, he directed that Congress not be told because of "extreme sensitivity" and "security risks." He cited a provision of the law that allows the President to forgo notice to Congress, if it is later provided in a "timely fashion."

Rewriting the Law

Members of Congress have said the law was never intended to allow an 11-month delay in notification. Several said they would push to rewrite the statute to require that the President tell Congress about covert activities within days of their initiation.

The legislators said the White House might have to accept such legislation as a price of blunting demands that the national security adviser be confirmed by the Senate.

"We're almost certainly going to ask for a specific number of hours or days," said Senator Leahy, vice chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence. "The national security adviser is probably safe from confirmation, but only in return for timely notice. Nobody thinks timely notice is 11 months."

Mr. Wright noted that the Administration had on other occasions taken pains to inform members of Congress of current operations. He said, for example, that the afternoon before the bombing of Libya, the White House reached him and told him to find a secure telephone. At 4 P.M. he received a complete briefing on a phone at a local office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"The law is unambiguous," Mr. Wright said. "It is completely clear."

National Security Council

Another issue being discussed by members of Congress is the possible misuse of the National Security Council staff by involving it directly in covert operations. The Administration has said a small group of staff members, working with the Central Intelligence Agency, smoothed the way for the shipment of arms by Israel and intermediaries working at the behest of the United States.

Senator David L. Boren, Democrat of Oklahoma, the next chairman of the Intelligence Committee, said the panel would make a "very careful and thorough" study of the National Security Council staff. He added that "we may have to look at what we mean by timely" notification.

The National Security Council staff, which is headed by the national security adviser, has been exempt from Congressional scrutiny. But some legislators have argued that if the Administration uses the council staff for operations, it must be accountable to Congress.